Who Is A Christian, Part 3

Montana,

In my last letter, I listed proofs for salvation from the New Testament book of 1 John. (Either refer to the previous blog or click here to download a pdf of the list.) Later, I reviewed the list and organized the items into eight categories listed in the table below. Several items are difficult to place into just one category. In some of these cases, I listed the item in two categories and identified them with an asterisk.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORIES OF PROOFS

	Category	# Ref	Defines Christian	Defines Non-Christian
1.	**Commandments**	5	2,3,23,32	4
2.	**Love**	16	5,7,20,21,22,27,30	5,8,10,13,14,15,16,20,22
3.	**Jesus**	12	10,13,15,25,29,34,35	9,17,23,24,25
4.	**Holy Spirit**	4	8,12,24,28	
5.	**Sin**	5	18,36,37*	3,11
6.	**World**	7	19,31*,33,37*	7,18,21*
7.	**Action**	11	1,4,14,16,17,31*	1,2,6,12,21*
8.	**Truth**	4	9,11,26	19

To help with understanding, I will give a brief explanation of each category and of the chart.

1. The first category, Commandments, refers to verses that speak about obedience to the commands of God and of Christ and remaining within the will of God.
2. Love includes any reference to the subject of loving other Christians or loving in general, or, in the case of the non-Christian, of hate.
3. The Jesus category includes any reference to a confession of Christ as Lord or as Messiah, or a belief in Christ or God and the things they have taught.
4. The Holy Spirit category includes references to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the Savior as evidence of salvation. 1 John 4:15-16 makes reference to the indwelling of God, but the purpose of the reference to the indwelling of God is not to prove salvation, but that the one who abides in love gives proof that he is indwelt by God.
5. Sin includes any reference to the habitual practice of sin or the denial of sin. Item 37 is included in this list because idolatry is a specific sin habitually practiced.
6. Category Six, World, includes any reference to how a person reacts to the world or how the world responds to the Christian. Item 37 is included here because any worship that is not directed toward a biblical revelation of God is directed toward things of the world and is, therefore, idolatry. Item 31 (Defines Christian) and Item 21 (Defines Non-

Christian) are included deal with fear. It seemed best to include them in how one reacts to the world around him or her.

7. This category, Practice, refers to general behavior and actions related to lifestyle and doing the right thing according to righteousness. References to fear are also included in this category because if we are acting according to fear, we are not acting according to faith.
8. The last category, Truth, has to do with any reference to truth as knowledge. Item 2 (Non-Christian) mentions truth, but is more specifically related to practice than knowledge.

The remaining two columns make reference to the items in the original tables that list references to those verses in 1 John which define a Christian and which define those who are not Christian. For example, under the heading Define Christian, in the first cell is the numbers 2. This refers to Item 2 in the first table, The Apostle John's Definition of a Christian, which points us to 1 John 2:3, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments."

In the first cell under the heading Define Non-Christian is the number 4. This refers to Item 4 in the second table, The Apostle John's Definition of a Non-Christian, which directs us to 1 John 2:4, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Once the items were compiled into the table, one fact stood out above the rest. John makes it very clear that anyone who knows Christ as Savior – anyone who is truly born again and is part of the kingdom of God – will be marked by love. Of the 62 items that define a Christian or a non-Christian, just over 25 percent of them refer to the Christian's ability to love others, in general, and to love the brotherhood – the church – specifically.

All but five of these references to love include a reference to Christian brothers. This means that a Christian will love other Christians, both male and female, and will love the church in general. The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-20; Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:24), and no person can legitimately claim to be a Christian who does not love the church.

Further study revealed that these eight categories could be reduced to three summary categories. These are shown in the table below.

SUMMARY CATEGORIES OF PROOFS

	Category	# Ref	Defines Christian	Defines Non-Christian
1.	**Profession**	7	10,25,29	4*,17,22*,24
2.	**Possession**	6	8, 12,16*,24,28,35	
3.	**Practice**	50+	Remainder + one*	Remainder + two*

Typically, when a person is asked for proof that they are saved, they will refer to some moment in the past when they invited Jesus into their heart or made a profession of faith in Christ. No matter how far back in their lives this event might have occurred, this is the moment they go back to as proof that they are a Christian. Their profession of faith becomes their greatest proof of salvation.

One's profession of faith in Christ is certainly proof of salvation, or John would not have mentioned it. Yet in this summary table of proofs, profession of faith is only mentioned three times out of the 62 proofs that John identified. More than 50 (over 80%) of the proofs for whether or not a person is truly saved relate to that person's practice, not their profession.

In fact, in two verses (1 John 2:4; 1 John 4:20), John points out that people who make a profession of faith that is not supported by practice are actually not saved, an indication that a profession of faith alone is insufficient in and of itself to determine whether or not a person is saved. He adds in 1 John 3:18 that a Christian is not to "love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

In other words, the primary evidence for whether or not a person is saved is not their profession of faith or a statement of salvation or even baptism, but the practices of their life – their behavior. The person who needs to evaluate their standing with Christ – whether or not they are citizens of the kingdom of God – should consider these questions based on the teachings from 1 John.

- Do you love others, especially other Christians (the church)?
- Do you obey the commandments of God and of Christ?
- Do you avoid habitual sinful practices?
- Are you involved in the study and the life-application of God's word?
- Do you choose the righteousness and the teachings of Christ over the morality and philosophies of the world?

Positive answers to these questions cannot be assumed simply because a person walks an aisle and professes them to be true and is baptized. Church membership should be based, not on a person's profession alone, but on their life practices. This cannot be determined during a time of invitation at the end of a worship service. It can only be assessed over an extended period of relationship with the candidate for membership.

And this can best be achieved in a discipleship relationship where the candidate spends a good deal of time together with a church member or a small group of church members who are able to make such an assessment.

In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), Jesus did not command His disciples to make converts – which is the providence of God – or church members. He called them – and

Christians today – to make disciples, which requires those who are saved to make long-term commitments of life and love to those who are newly-professed Christians or even non Christians.

Finally, we cannot leave the Holy Spirit out of this discussion. John makes it clear on four occasions (1 John 2:20; 2:27; 3:24; 4:13) that the Christian will know that they are a member of the kingdom of God by the testimony of the Holy Spirit living within them. All of these behaviors mentioned above will come to fruition in a saved person because the Holy Spirit will cause them to happen.

The growth and change in a saved person may not happen overnight, but will happen because the Holy Spirit is not going to leave us or forsake us (John 14:16-17).

> John 14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

And, being God, He cannot fail to accomplish His work in us (Isaiah 46:10; Isaiah 55:11; Phil. 1:6).

> Isaiah 46:10 My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.

> Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

> Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

In summary, no person is a Christian simply because they choose to be a Christian or because they say they are a Christian. A person is a Christian because the Holy Spirit comes into their heart and begins to do a work of grace in them that overflows onto other people. That is called discipleship.

Every Christian is called to discipleship. In fact, you should consider praying about and seeking out someone who can mentor you, who can help you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I know that this letter has been long and possibly a bit of an overload of information. But I write you this letter for the same purpose that John wrote the letter we refer to as 1 John.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan